

### Exegesis

**Vs. 21-24** – Having explained that Jesus spoke in one of the most public parts of the temple (i.e., the treasury), John returns to the scene. And, playing off of his origins once more, Jesus says, “I go my way.” The Lord came from the Father, and he will return to the Father (cf. 7:33). But Jesus also explains that, after he’s gone, the religious leaders will continue to “seek” him, and, despite their searching, they will “die” in their “sins.” It isn’t because they won’t be able to find Jesus; the Lord explains that the reason for their fate is because they’re not *permitted* to follow him (“you cannot come”).<sup>1</sup> Those last few statements are easy enough to understand; after all, the religious leaders will not follow Jesus as he goes on “[his] way” if they do not believe Jesus’ claims. And to disbelieve Jesus’ words essentially means that you’ve signed your own death certificate (cf. Eph. 2:1-10).

But what of the statement that the religious leaders would “seek” Jesus? Aren’t you supposed to find Jesus if you seek him? Generally speaking, yes; however, only those who seek Jesus as the Son of God will find him (cf. Lu. 2:49). John’s entire purpose for writing his own account of Jesus’s life was to dispel any doubt when it came to the Lord’s identity (Jn. 20:31; cf. Heb. 11:6). The Pharisees’ problem was that they wanted a different deliverer than the one presented to them in Jesus.<sup>2</sup> But, regardless of their wants, Jesus was the genuine article. If, in looking for a savior, one comes across Jesus and finds him deficient, what more could that person want? Such a person would end up searching for the rest of their life without ever finding a suitable replacement. Their countrymen may even go on searching for many generations after. But they would all, as Jesus points out, end up dying in their sins before they ever found what they were looking for.

Before, when Jesus spoke similarly, the crowds thought he meant that he was going to diaspora (cf. 7:35). Here, however, the Pharisees believe that Jesus is going to “kill himself?” With the true meaning of Jesus’ words going over their heads, the religious leaders thought the only place they couldn’t follow Jesus was in death. And, so, the Pharisees reason that if he says he’s going to a place that they cannot go, then, indeed, Jesus means that he’s going to commit suicide. Or, maybe they were trying to twist Jesus’ words so that they suggested something reprehensible. After all, barring notable exceptions such as Samson (Jdgs. 16:30) or the Jews

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus will say this very thing to the disciples (13:33). The difference between the two instances is that where the disciples will *eventually* be able to follow Jesus (13:36), the religious leaders will *never* be able to follow Jesus if they persist in their unbelief. As Morris (1995), p. 396, rightly points out, given that this exact phrasing is used in both passages, “we cannot but feel that John attached especial importance to these sayings.”

<sup>2</sup> Carson (1992), p. 341.

who chose to kill themselves rather than surrender to the Romans at Masada in 74BC, the act of taking one's life was always looked at unfavorably by the Israelites.<sup>3</sup> Josephus even said that those who commit such a heinous act would be confined to the darkest place of Hades.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is hard to say whether they were genuine with their inquiry or meant it as a slur. Either way, coming to such a conclusion reinforces how little they understood.

Jesus responds by saying that the Pharisees are from below and "of this world," whereas the Lord says he's "from above" and "not of this world." But his words aren't meant to invoke the idea of the underworld.<sup>5</sup> Instead, they're meant to recall John's prelude (cf. 1:9-10). To say it another way, the religious leaders were worldly, whereas Jesus was heavenly.<sup>6</sup> When you compared the two groups, they differed at their most fundamental level. Jesus' essence was from above—i.e., of God—and the Pharisees' essence was from below—i.e., of the Devil (cf. vs. 39). Interestingly, rather than use spatial terminology, as he does here, in the Synoptics, Jesus is found of using temporal language when he makes a similar comparison (i.e., "this age" vs. "the age to come;" Mat. 12:32; Mr. 10:30; Lu. 18:30).<sup>7</sup> But whether Jesus is speaking spatially or temporally, the lesson is the same: the two points of comparison are distinct, one being the clear winner and one being the clear loser. It's much better to be from "above" and to be a part of the "age to come" than it is to be from "below" and to be part of "this age." One holds a promise of life, whereas the other only promises death.

Sadly, because they are worldly, Jesus reiterates that they will "die" in their "sins" if they do not accept "that I am *he*." What could he mean by this? While Jesus has said "I am" multiple times before, he always completed the sentence (i.e., "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," etc.; cf. 5:43; 6:35, 48, 51; 7:28-29, 34, 36; 8:12, 16, 18, 23). And while the KJV supplies the pronoun to make the sentence more readable, it is worth remembering that the "he" is not present in Greek (this is why it is italicized). Jesus does not provide a predicate; he doesn't round out the sentence. Thus, technically speaking, this is the first time in John's account that Jesus claims to be the "I AM." As numerous OT passages make clear, this is the official name of God (Ex. 3:14; cf. Isaiah 41:4; 43:13, 25; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6).<sup>8</sup> Of particular note is how God explains to Israel, "You are my witnesses...and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he" (Isa. 43:10). As God said then, so, too, does Jesus say here that he is the I AM. While they don't comprehend it at this point, it won't take

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<sup>3</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 258; Keener (2012), 1:743.

<sup>4</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> Keener (2012), 1:744.

<sup>6</sup> Morris (1995), p. 396.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson (2015), p. 186.

<sup>8</sup> Keener (2012), 1:744.

long before they realize what the Lord meant (cf. vs. 28, 58). And considering how they responded when they finally did understand, there can only be two possible responses to Jesus' words. Either this claim was so blasphemous that the person who said it would be worthy of death (vs. 59; cf. Isa. 45:5), or it was so revelatory that the person who said it would be worthy of worship. "It is impossible to have the kind of faith John envisages without having a high view of Christ."<sup>9</sup>

**Vs. 25-27** – Notably, this is not to say that they were utterly lost intellectually. There must've been some comprehension because they then ask Jesus, "Who are you?" Given the word order in Greek, their response is far more forceful than what might appear in our English translations. It was as if they said, "Just who do you think you are?"<sup>10</sup> And, coincidentally, Jesus' response is just as divisive, for he says, "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning."<sup>11</sup> One can hear the exasperation in Jesus' words. He had been telling them, over and over again, who he really was, but they have been slow to comprehend. In fact, on multiple occasions, Jesus explicitly told the people that he was, among other things, the very Son of God (cf. 5:25, 27; 7:16; etc.).<sup>12</sup> His tune has not changed; it was the Jews who simply refused to listen.

Jesus continues by saying, "I have many things to say and to judge of you...." What were the many (not few) things he wanted to say? Or, in what ways did Jesus wish to render judgment? The Lord doesn't explain. The mission given to him by God is far more critical at this juncture, and so, rather than expound on what he means, he moves on.<sup>13</sup> Because, as the Lord clarifies, he does not speak his own word; no, Jesus only says "those things which [he has] heard of [the Father];" and the things that Jesus has heard from God are true because "he that sent [Jesus] is [also] true." They asked who Jesus was, and the Lord rooted his identity in his connection to the Father. But, as he did in vs. 20, John interrupts the narrative to point out that the religious leaders didn't understand Jesus. Which, may be painfully obvious to us, but, nevertheless, it is worth reiterating the point that it is impossible to comprehend Jesus if you cannot grasp his

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<sup>9</sup> Morris (1995), p. 397.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson (2015), p. 186; Köstenberger (2008), p. 259.

<sup>11</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 125, states that because Jesus uses an obscure Greek phrase here, his response is among the most difficult phrases to translate in all of John's account. For instance, some have taken it to be a rhetorical question (i.e., "Haven't I already answered that?"); while, others—Thompson (2015), p. 187—take it to be nothing more than exclamation (i.e., "Why am I even talking to you?!"). Morris (1995), p. 398-400, has a thorough overview of the various approaches but opts to uphold the traditional rendering, "What I told you from the beginning." Carson (1992), p. 345-346, agreeing with the standard translation, also has a helpful explanation on why there are so many diverse but valid readings.

<sup>12</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 237.

<sup>13</sup> Morris (1995), p. 400.

connection to the Father (cf. vs. 19). To know one is to know the other. Failing to know one is to fail to know the other.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 5

Text: John 8:21-27

In today's passage, the Pharisees ask Jesus, "Who are you?" Admittedly, anyone who's paid attention to John's account would no doubt wonder how they could've even asked such a question. Who was Jesus, if not the very Son of God?! On multiple occasions, the Lord has made this point abundantly clear. But, as we'll see, it's hard to make someone understand something when they simply refuse to understand. Or, as the saying goes, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." Try as he might; even Jesus couldn't get a stubborn person to listen.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/YINOfVc>